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ABSTRACT

This report is the second in a series that focuses on the appointment and training of public college and university trustees. It reports on a study that compared the perceptions of governors, who are usually involved directly in the appointment process, and state higher education executive officers (SHEEOs), who are usually on the fringes of the process. In 47 of the 50 states, governors appoint all or a portion of the public college and university trustees, but in 3 states, trustees are elected. Responses to a survey were received from 41 SHEEOs and 24 governor's offices. With these responses, all 50 states were represented. Both groups agreed that the recommendations and information given by legislators, immediate staff, cabinet members, SHEEOs, and other trustees were important or very important in helping identify potential appointees. Governors and SHEEOs had similar opinions about the personal attributes of appointees, except for the area of political party affiliation. About one-third of governors called this important; more than half of SHEEOs perceived party affiliation to be an important selection criterion. Both groups identified the quality of the appointee as being very important for success, and both viewed the training given by the institution as important. The two groups did differ in their perceptions of the priority given academic trustee appointments, with governors indicating that they placed high priority on these appointments, and SHEEOs less likely to think appointments were given a high priority. (Contains 3 tables and 10 references.) (SLD)

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The Gubernatorial Appointment Process of Public College and University Trustees: Comparing Practices and Perceptions

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PREFACE

This report is the eleventh in a series of policy papers issued by the Educational Policy Institute (EPI) of Virginia Tech. The Institute is an interdisciplinary group of faculty with common interests in education in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The mission of EPI is to: (a) establish an organization devoted to educational policy research and services in the Commonwealth of Virginia and the nation, (b) conduct research intended to inform educational policy makers, (c) focus research interests of the faculty and graduate students on educational policy issues, and (d) act as a service unit for educational policy groups such as the State Board of Education and the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia.

This paper is the second of our reports that focuses on the on the appointment and training of public college and university trustees. Most authorities agree that college trustees must play a more active role as overseers of their institutions. If trustees are to be more active, governors and legislators should appoint individuals with the necessary skills or develop orientation and training programs that ensure their success. This very timely research, helps identify key selection criteria and makes a number of recommendation that may improve the selection, orientation, and training of these very important public servants.

Additional copies of this report may be obtained by contacting Dr. Steven M. Janosik at the Institute or they can be downloaded from EPI's web site. I hope you find the information to be of interest. The EPI web site is located at <http://filebox.vt.edu/chre/elps/EPI.>

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The Gubernatorial Appointment Process of Public College and University Trustees: Comparing Practices and Perceptions

By
Sandra L. Dika and Steven M. Jnaosik

Historically, the gubernatorial appointment of public trustees has been criticized as being a problematic process (Callan & Honetschlager, 1992). Several pervasive perceptions about the selection process of trustees are at the root of this criticism. The motivation for certain appointments has been questioned and governors are seen to use board appointments to reward individuals and organizations for political support. There appears to be little differentiation between appointment to governing boards and appointment to other boards and commissions, and although board appointments are considered politically sensitive, they do not appear to be important to governors. Observers note that there are often no explicit qualification criteria and no systematic processes for reviewing qualifications, recruiting, and screening potential appointees.

This perception of problematic appointment processes has been accompanied by an increased interest in the effectiveness of individual trustees and of boards as a whole. The underlying assumption for this study was that board quality or effectiveness is dependant on the constitution of the board, which, in turn, is dependent on the process of selection as well as the orientation and training activities available to trustees. The study incorporates and compares the perceptions of governors, who are directly involved in the appointment process, and State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO), who are usually on the fringe of the process. Figure 1 provides a conceptual framework to illustrate the main variables of importance in this study. The framework was outlined by Michael et al. (1997) in a study of trustee selection and orientation in Ohio.

The Model

In this model, criteria used in selecting trustees depend on the roles played by key actors (e.g. governors, presidents, and State Higher Education Executive Officers) in the selection/appointment process. The orientation and training activities would reflect the criteria established for the initial selection of trustees as well as the indicators of effectiveness emphasized by the board. The selection criteria, along with the type of orientation available, would ultimately determine the effectiveness of the board.

Key Players in the Selection Process

In 47 of the 50 states, governors appoint all or a portion of public college and university trustees (Janosik & Dika, 2000). In Minnesota, Nevada, and South Carolina, trustees are elected by the General Assembly. Although most researchers agree that systems for appointing public college and university governing boards are preferable to elections, there are problems with appointment systems as well (Rose, 1993).

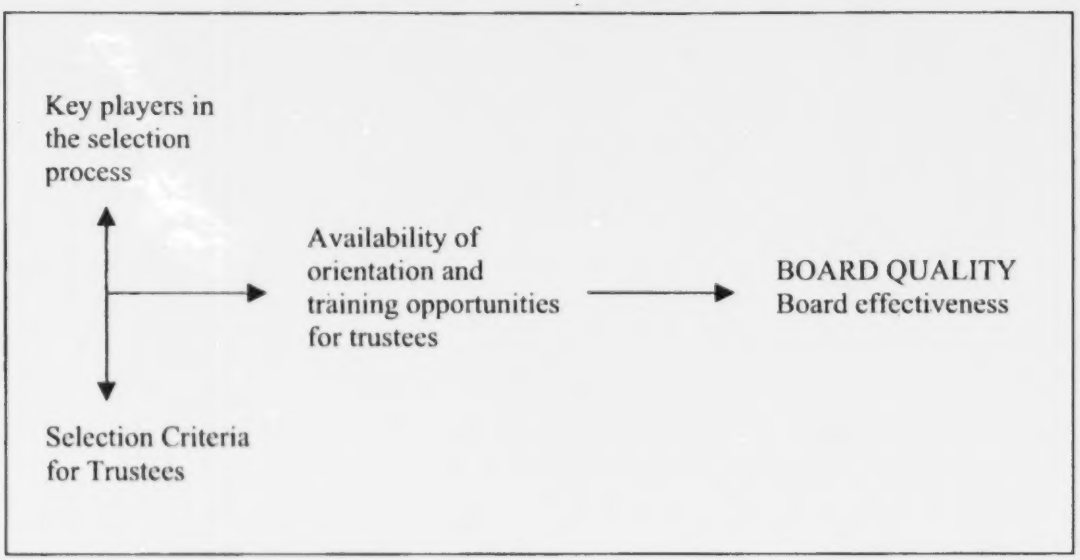
Key players in the selection process
Availability of orientation and training opportunities for trustees
BOARD QUALITY
Board effectiveness
Selection Criteria for Trustees

Figure 1. Conceptual framework for the relationship between trustee appointment/selection and training (Adapted from Michael, Schwartz, & Hamilton, 1997).

> The appointment of trustees in public institutions has been described as a fight over the 'three p's': prestige, politics, and power. Appointment to the university board may be among the most prestigious appointments a governor has to offer his/her loyal supporters. (Kohn & Mortimer, 1983, p. 32)

In the case where the state governor appoints trustees, the influence of groups in making recommendations for appointments is of interest for identifying key actors other than the governor.

The influence of different groups in making recommendations for appointments has been studied by examining the perceptions of recommending groups and trustees. Recommending groups include the state-level higher education board, presidents, other trustees, alumni, and administrators. In Rose's (1993) study of the trustee selection process for public four-year institutions in Virginia, 57 percent of presidents, 52 percent of alumni, 44 percent of current trustees, and 63 percent of administrators said they had a "great deal of influence" or "some influence" in making recommendations for trustee appointments. This suggests a relatively high perceived degree of influence, although a significant proportion of each of these groups (over 20%) indicated that they had "little influence" or "no influence."

Rose (1993) also interviewed governors' constituents to determine the roles of state executive staff in the trustee selection process. Secretaries of Education, Secretaries of the Commonwealth, cabinet secretaries, alumni associations, and legislators were identified as influential persons in the selection process.

Michael et al. (1997) investigated Ohio trustees' perceptions of the reasons for their selection. For public university sector trustees, the role of the governor was described as most important, followed by the leadership of the institution and the other trustees. The influence of the president and the State Board of Regents were perceived to be unimportant.

There is insufficient evidence to draw any conclusions about the influence of recommending groups. This small body of literature is restricted to single state studies. In addition, the literature is almost exclusively based on the perceptions of trustees and recommending groups rather than from those who receive the recommendations and make the appointments.

Selection Criteria

While a great deal of the literature on selection criteria is opinion-based (e.g. Association of Governing Boards (AGB), 1981), there have been a few studies that have attempted to determine overt and covert criteria used in making appointments. In Rose's (1993) study of Virginia's selection process, institutional representatives were asked which criteria were used for selection and which criteria should have been used for selection from a list of 28 criteria. Institutional representatives included alumni, trustees, presidents, administrators, and faculty. Overall, the top five criteria selected by respondents included: (a) "political relationship with influential state officials" (80.5%); (b) "demonstrated leadership skills" (75.7%); (c) "personal integrity" (68.6%); (d) "minority status of individuals" (66.2%); and (e) "alumni status" (63.8%).

When institutional respondents were asked which criteria should have been used, the results were somewhat different. The top five most cited criteria were: (a) "demonstrated leadership skills" (76.7%); (b) "ability to contribute to and support the mission, direction and needs of the institution" (74.1%)' (c) "commitment to the institution" (73.6%); (d) "personal integrity" (70.6%); and (e) "knowledge of higher education/familiarity with problems of higher education" (68.2%). In sum, those criteria that could be associated with Kohn and Mortimer's (1983) 'three p's' were recognized as influential, but not favored for ideal selection practices.

Rose (1993) also asked state executive constituents about criteria used in the selection process. The two state agency executives closest to the appointment process in Virginia agreed on 18 of 28 criteria that were influential in the appointment process. All criteria identified by the institutional group were included in the list. Notably, while 58.8% of institutional constituents indicated that "previous financial contributions to political campaigns or political parties" was a criterion used for selection, neither state executive representative mentioned this criterion as influential.

Ohio trustees indicated perceived reasons for their selection from a list of seven criteria (Michael et al., 1997). On a five-point scale, public university sector trustees rated their personal leadership qualities (M=4.29), political affiliation (M=4.03), and success in the business world (M=3.97) as the most important reasons for their selection. Trustees also considered their educational background, administrative background, and personal economic status to be somewhat important in their appointment.

While the literature contains some information about trustees' and institutional representatives' perceptions of selection criteria, information on criteria used by governors' offices is lacking. Those involved with the appointment process may be reluctant to share their criteria for appointment, resulting in non-response as in Rose's (1993) study, or in politically desirable responses.

Board Effectiveness

Chait, Holland, and Taylor (1991) were among the first researchers to study the actual practices of effective governing boards rather than simply prescribe what boards should do. Although their study focused on private sector boards, the resultant model of board effectiveness has been considered to be an appropriate one for public boards as well. The researchers made site visits to 22 campuses, did interviews with more than 110 trustees and college presidents, and collected over 400 self-assessment surveys from board members (Chait, Holland, & Taylor, 1996). Three major findings were revealed: (a) Specific characteristics and behaviors distinguish strong and weak boards; (b) There is a positive and systematic association between the board's performance and that of the institution; and (c) Self-assessment of boards has questionable validity as an accurate and objective measure of performance (Myers, 1997). Chait et al. (1996) identified six distinct competencies of demonstrably effective boards of trustees: (a) contextual – the ability to take culture and norms of institution into account; (b) educational – one's knowledge about the institution, profession, and board's responsibilities, roles, and performance; (c) interpersonal – ability to work as a group, attend to the board's collective welfare, and foster cohesiveness; (d) analytical – ability to recognize complexities and subtleties of issues and accepts ambiguity and uncertainty; (e) political – ability to accept the primary responsibility to develop and maintain healthy relationships among major constituents; and (f) strategic – ability to envision a direction and shape a strategy (Chait et al., 1996). Of particular interest in this study is the educational dimension.

The educational process in private institutions with effective governing boards was characterized by consciously created opportunities for education and development, where constant feedback and self-reflection were integrated to diagnose strengths and limitations, and to examine mistakes. Although the authors did not suggest that their work would apply to public boards, the relevance of these competencies should not be diminished.

Myers (1997) used the Chait et al. model to study the effectiveness of multi-campus system boards. Using the same interview technique as in the Chait study, Myers found that effective multi-campus boards were characterized primarily by competencies in the political, strategic, and analytical dimensions. In terms of the educational dimension, boards indicated they had some fear of public discussion and "open" training, especially when they had experienced extensive public criticism. All boards cited the importance of a quality system administration to keep the board well informed about the issues, the system, and the institutions.

Summary

Selection, training, and effectiveness of boards of trustees have generally been studied through the perceptions of those who are not directly responsible for trustee appointment and education. Key actors in the selection process are from the political sector and the institutional sector, including alumni. Personal leadership qualities and political affiliations have been used as primary selection criteria. While orientation and training are assumed to be important for board effectiveness, Ohio trustees emphasized their own professional experience as more important than training provided by the institution. Finally, research on effective private boards has found education to be an important dimension, while one national study on public boards found that education is not emphasized in the same way for political reasons.

Overall, the research on selection, training, and effectiveness of public higher education governing boards is limited. As mentioned before, most of the literature is prescriptive and limited by a few prolific authors, often connected with the Association for Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges. Studies are usually limited to a single state. Consequently, there is a gap in our understanding about actual practices in the selection and training of trustees. In addition, we know little about appointment and training processes from the point of view of those directly involved in administering these processes.

The current study incorporates the perceptions of both central (governors) and key peripheral (SHEEO) actors involved in the appointment and training of college and university trustees. Perceptions of key actors are compared with actual appointment practices reported by governors. Specifically, the study addresses the following questions:

1. Do governors and SHEEO officers differ in their perceptions of the influence of key players in the appointment process?
2. Do governors and SHEEO officers differ in their perceptions of the importance of, or emphasis on, certain personal attributes when making appointments to college and university boards?

3. Do governors and SHEEO officers differ in their perceptions of the factors that contribute to board effectiveness?

Method

A research team led by a former Virginia Deputy Secretary of Education (currently Associate Professor of Higher Education) designed the study.

Sample

The sampling frame for this study was a list of 50 State Higher Education Officers (SHEEO) and 50 state governors. Responses were received from 41 SHEEO and 24 governor's offices, for response rates of 82.0% and 48.0% respectively. Within these responses, all 50 states were represented.

Instruments

With the intent to obtain information from all 50 states about formal guidelines and actual practices in the appointment and training of appointed academic board of trustees, a survey research design was used. Two instruments, one for SHEEO and one for governor's offices were designed based on a review of the extant literature. Several faculty members with expertise in higher education governance and policy, a former Secretary of Education, and two members of a state higher education coordinating body reviewed the questionnaires for content validity. Their comments were used to revise the questionnaires. The questionnaire for SHEEO officers consisted of 26 items focused on gubernatorial appointment and state-level orientation and training processes. The questionnaire for governors was slightly longer at 30 questions, and included sub-questions on the nature of training and orientation programs. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients for the two questionnaires were .68 and .80 respectively.

Procedures

Questionnaires were mailed to SHEEO officers and governors. Two weeks later, a follow-up reminder was sent to all potential participants. Approximately one month after the reminder, letters and a second questionnaire were sent to all SHEEO and governors who had not yet responded. Finally, one month after the third mailing, any remaining non-respondents were contacted by phone.

Cross-tabulations were conducted to determine any differences in the perceptions of SHEEO officers and the practices of governors in the areas of key players, personal attributes, priority of appointments, and influence of factors in board effectiveness. The significance level for the chi-square tests was set at $p < .05$.

Findings

The findings are reported in four sections: (a) Key Players; (b) Personal Attributes; (c) Factors Contributing to Board Effectiveness; and (d) Priority of Appointments.

Key Players

Overall, both groups indicated that the recommendations and information given by legislators, immediate staff, cabinet members, SHEEO, and other trustees were important or very important in helping to identify potential appointees. Campaign staff were considered by both groups to be relatively unimportant (20.8% of governors and 33.4% of SHEEO). There were no significant differences between governors and SHEEO respondents in the reported influence of key players in the appointment process. One interesting result is that governors and SHEEO respondents had similar perceptions about the influence of State Higher Education Officers. This result may be seen as an indication that SHEEO respondents were not unduly negative in their responses to the survey. The results of the cross-tabulations for influence of key players are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Differences in Perceptions of Importance of Key Players

Key players	Percent Ranked Important or Very Important		χ^2	*df*	*p*
	Governors	SHEEO			
Cabinet members	70.8	48.0	4.021	3	.259
Immediate staff members	75.0	80.0	.273	3	.965
College/university presidents	58.3	36.0	4.137	3	.247
State Higher Education Executive Officers	58.3	56.0	2.913	3	.405
Other trustees	70.9	56.0	1.223	3	.748
Campaign staff	20.8	33.4	7.323	3	.062
Members of General Assembly or legislative body	69.6	60.0	3.509	3	.320

Personal Attributes

To gain a better understanding of the appointment process, the researchers asked respondents to indicate the importance of selected personal attributes, identified by Kohn and Mortimer (1983), when making such decisions. Governors who responded to the questionnaire indicated that personal leadership qualities, educational background, and demonstrated success in the business world were the most highly valued personal attributes of those listed. These qualities also topped the list of perceived important attributes indicated by SHEEO respondents.

Once again, governors and SHEEO respondents had very similar perceptions, except in the case of party affiliation. While about one-third of governors (35%) said that party affiliation was important or very important, over half of the SHEEO respondents (58%) perceived party affiliation to be an important selection criterion. The results of the chi-square tests are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Differences in Perceptions of Importance of Attributes

Attribute	Percent Ranked Important or Very Important		χ^2	*df*	*p*
	Governors	SHEEO			
Personal economic wealth	4.5	18.5	2.848	3	.416
Educational background	82.6	65.3	2.336	3	.506
Success in academia	39.1	7.4	7.430	3	.059
Party affiliation	34.8	57.7	9.361	3	.025
Business success	69.5	81.5	2.548	3	.467
Political ideology	34.8	44.4	6.004	3	.111
Administrative background	60.8	48.1	.876	3	.831
Personal leadership qualities	95.6	96.3	2.871	2	.238

Factors Contributing to Board Effectiveness

Governors and SHEEO respondents were asked to respond to a selected list of factors to indicate the contribution of each to board effectiveness. Both groups identified the quality of the individual appointee as the most important factor leading to board success. The percentage of governors and SHEEO ranking this factor as important or very important were 100% and 92% respectively. Both groups ranked the quality of training given by the institution as important or very important (70.0% of governors and 66.7% of SHEEO).

Overall, governors tended to rate all factors as more important than SHEEO respondents did. While about three-quarters of governors perceived that the quality of the state orientation (79%) and the quality of guidance from the governor's office (73%) were important or very important in the effectiveness of current board appointments, only one-third and one-half of SHEEO respondents had similar views, respectively. None of the differences in perceptions were significantly different at the 5% level. Results of this analysis are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Differences in Perceptions of Importance of Factors Related to Success in Meeting Higher Education Goals

Factors	Percent Ranked Important or Very Important		χ^2	*df*	*p*
	Governors	SHEEO			
Quality of trustee	100.0	92.0	4.912	2	.086
Quality of state level orientation program	78.6	35.3	7.154	3	.067
Quality of state level training program	58.3	30.8	3.165	3	.367
Quality of guidance given by Governor's office	72.8	47.6	3.045	3	.385
Quality of training given by the institution	70.0	66.7	1.631	3	.652

Priority of Appointments

While there were almost no statistically significant differences in the perceptions of governors and SHEEO respondents in the areas of influence of key players, importance of personal attributes, and factors contributing to board effectiveness, the two groups did differ in their perception of the priority allocated to academic trustee appointments ($\chi^2(1, \underline{N} = 52) = 4.805, p < .05$). Governors almost unanimously (91%) indicated that they placed high priority on appointments, whereas about two-thirds of SHEEO respondents (66%) perceived the same level of priority. The other third of SHEEO respondents (34%) felt that such appointments were only of medium priority to governors.

Discussion and Recommendations

There is a great deal of agreement between governors and SHEEO respondents on the importance and influence of certain factors in the gubernatorial appointment process of college and university trustees. The only differences were in the perceived importance of party affiliation for appointments and in the perceived priority placed on appointments by the governor's office. Governors presented themselves in a positive light; nonpartisan and highly concerned with appointments. SHEEO respondents had a less favorable, although not negative, view of governors in these two areas.

There may be several explanations for the high level of agreement between the two respondent groups.

- Overall, state higher education agencies have a positive relationship with governors' offices. There is a good deal of information-sharing, and SHEEO have a firm understanding of the appointment process as practiced by the governor's office.

- Both groups were very honest in their responses, thus presenting a more accurate version of current trustee appointment processes in the United States.

- Governors presented themselves favorably, and SHEEO respondents did the same, being reluctant to appear critical of governors.

As always, the reported data do not tell the complete story. Almost half of the SHEEO respondents were unwilling to answer the questions about their perceptions of governors' practices in the appointment process. Some indicated that they could not speak for the governor, and others indicated they did not know enough about the process. This reluctance suggests that some SHEEO respondents may be anxious about appearing critical of the trustee appointment process. Assuming, however, that these two groups responded in an honest and candid manner, the following recommendations can be made on the selection and training process of public college and university trustees.

Key Players

The previous research on key players is based mainly on the perceptions of trustees and recommending groups. Some authors suggest that governors are pressured to use board appointments to reward individuals and organizations for political support (Callan & Honetschlager, 1992) but in this study, campaign staff had the least influence on the selection of trustees. Legislators were the leading key players, as they were identified as being important or very important by 80% of governors. **To decrease public skepticism about trustee appointments and improve the quality of the recruiting and screening processes, governors may want to more formally recognize the value placed on the recommendations made by legislators by instituting a joint legislative advisory board to assist with the appointment process.**

Selection Criteria

Less than half of states have codified criteria for trustee appointment. The selection of trustees is based on the preferences of the governor rather than on formal criteria. Most previous studies have described trustees' and institutional representatives' perceptions of selection criteria. In this study, governors had consensus on three main skill set areas as a result of rating personal attributes of trustees and identifying informal qualifications used to make appointments: (a) personal leadership qualities (business and community), (b) educational background or interest in education, and (c) success in the business world. All governors in the study rated the quality of the trustee as important or very important in meeting the goals of trustee appointments. Consistent selection criteria (quality inputs) play an significant role in ensuring board effectiveness (quality outputs).

To improve the quality of the appointment process, three selection criteria for public college and university trustees; (a) personal leadership qualities (business and community), (b) educational background or interest in education, and (c) success in the business world; should be added in a consistent manner to state codes. A short description of each criterion should be included to provide more explicit selection guidelines for those involved in the recruitment and selection process.

Orientation Opportunities

Studies on the availability and effectiveness of training are notably absent in the literature on public college and university trustees. In the present study, governors identified the quality of the state orientation program as a very important factor in meeting their higher education goals, second only to quality of the trustee. Despite this professed degree of importance, orientation programs are voluntary in all but one state. **To ensure a consistent base of knowledge, a formal orientation program for new trustees should be mandatory and should be provided by the state-level education agency.**

Orientation topics should be specific to operation of higher education boards and to the institution served. The most common topics in orientation programs are the role and responsibilities of trustees, a review of state statutes regarding sunshine, public meeting, and conflict of interest laws, budget and finance issues, the legislative process, and press relations. Orientation to budget and fiscal issues should be provided on an as-needed basis.

Training Opportunities

Governors identified training provided by institutions as more important than training provided by state agencies in meeting their higher education goals. In states that do provide training opportunities, these opportunities are voluntary. This is understandable given that many trustees are professionals with high time demands. Requiring trustees to attend an additional set of mandatory meetings beyond the time commitment given to the board itself may not be realistic. The opportunity to improve one's skill set relative to the higher education enterprise should not be ignored, however. **Individual institution should provide on-going training**

opportunities. Training opportunities should be designed keeping the time demands of trustees in mind.

In many states, the state-level higher education agency is responsible for training opportunities. These agencies are in the best position collect data and monitor training at public institutions. Accordingly, individual institutions should be required to develop and submit training program plans to this central agency. The state-level agency should be charged with the responsibility of identifying best practices for training, monitoring the training programs, and collecting data on training practices. This information should be shared with college presidents and rectors of the boards. A central training web site might also be developed to facilitate a degree of standardized trustee training across the public boards. On-line training modules would be one method to allow trustees to study on their own time and at their own pace. Training programs most often include topics on governance issues, academic programs, budget and finance, personnel and other current issues.

Future Research

This study sought information on the role of selection, orientation, and training for improving the quality of public college and university trustees. While previous work in this area is prescriptive and based largely on perceptions of trustees and institutional representatives, this study chronicles the actual practices of governors. The study provided valuable information about key players and selection criteria used by governors, as well as a snapshot of current orientation and training opportunities across the states. Information on board effectiveness was inferred from governors' perceptions of the effectiveness of appointments and their attributions of this effectiveness. Future studies should include questions about the competencies of effective boards identified by Chait et al. (1996).

This study also identified current practices and consensus among governors, specifically in the selection of public college and university trustees. A future study could determine whether there is support for the recommendations made by the researchers, which were largely based on points of consensus among the governors who participated in this study. Potential participants in the study would include governors, State Higher Education Executive Officers, and institutional representatives, as these three groups are identified within the recommendations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study fills in some of the gaps in the literature on selection, orientation, and training of public college and university trustees. Information on formal guidelines and actual practices facilitates the understanding of these processes beyond the perceptions of peripheral actors. This study presents a national picture of selection, orientation, and training processes, which is significantly larger in scope than previous single state studies. As researchers begin to have a better understanding of these practices across states, those interested in higher education governance will be better able to design best practices that ensure board quality and effective systems of higher education.

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